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## THE SCREEN

Continued from page 7

his way; but never had he spoken to one of them so tenderly.

"I had rather not talk of my brother's death—even to you," Troy answered. And it struck him oddly, as he spoke, that he should say "even to you." Yet somehow it seemed natural. "It may be different in the future," he went on; "but it would do no good now: only harm."

"Very well, as you like," said the older man. "But when you have heard what I have to tell of your mother you'll give me the sequel to my story, the end which you know and I don't."

YES," Troy agreed. "But it's not a merry tale. If you loved her, it will make you sad."

"Yet I had rather hear it than anything else in the world. Not a day has passed in all these years that I haven't asked myself 'Where is Margaret now—Margaret, who, ought to have been my Margaret? Is she happy? Is she living, or has she passed out of this world?' When my daughter told me your full name yesterday, then I hoped I should have the answer to those questions through you."

"Does Lady Daura know the story of you and my mother?" Troy asked quickly. If Lord Gorme said yes, it would account perhaps for Daura's offer of friendship,—friendship in such unfriendly circumstances. He had hoped with all his soul, for an instant, that the answer might be yes, because the girl's kindness could thus be explained in sweet and womanly fashion. She need no longer be for him a subtle, beguiling creature, a white witch. But the answer was no.

"My daughters have never heard me speak of Margaret Cameron," Lord Gorme answered. "It was better not. They wouldn't have understood. They love to think of their mother, whom I married years after I lost Margaret. They would believe me disloyal, if they knew, and that would be to misjudge me. I was loyal to all my wife wished or expected of me; but she didn't care, or want to care, as Margaret and I cared for each other. As it was with me, so it was with Elinor. There was someone else she would have liked to marry, if she had been given her way. Your mother was a Cameron, you know, and our families had hated each other ever since there were Camerons and Scores. It was a case of Romeo and Juliet over again—and those were the names Margaret and I had for each other. I was a soldier in those days. We met first at a ball in Edinburgh, where I was stationed. It was love at first sight for both of us—and the difficulties we foresaw added zest and romance. But they were even greater than we expected, especially for Margaret. Neither of us had a penny, and Margaret was devoted to her father, an invalid. She dared not let him know what was going on. We both trusted to luck. It seemed as if all must come right if we waited. But someone sent her father an anonymous letter, betraying the secret we thought nobody knew. Margaret confessed, and, thinking her father's life in danger, promised to give me up."

"It was just at this time that Robert Troy came to Edinburgh, with a letter of introduction to some relatives of Margaret's. He was very rich, and—I don't know much of American politics—but already he was a man of importance, and bade fair to rise higher. Perhaps he was fascinating too. People said so. Anyhow, Margaret was engaged to him within a month after breaking with me—and it was by her father's death-bed that she married. I sent back all her letters as she asked me to do,—the letters I used to keep in this silver box,—and I never heard of her again after she went to America; that is, I never heard anything personal. What the world knew of your father, I knew—that was all; never anything of Margaret."

"You knew that my father lost all he had in a national panic?" Troy said.

"I heard that the bulk of his fortune went. But Margaret's old friends believed that something was saved. She never wrote, however, never came back to Scotland; for by that time all her near relatives were dead. As for me, I could not write to her, of course. Not long before your father's trouble I had come into my title and married. My wife was English. Her people placed some absurd value on a title. She herself was not like that. But she was very young. She was willing to please her parents, and I—well, money was badly needed for Dunelm. She was a charming girl, and everybody thought me a lucky fellow; for she was pretty as well as an heiress. As it turned out, her fortune was—er—considerably

overestimated. I learned that fact after we were engaged; but of course it couldn't be allowed to make any difference. She lived only five years after our marriage. Daura was a baby when she died; but Annira remembers her mother. I fancy the two girls often speak of her, as of a beautiful ideal. And I—well, I fear I haven't been a satisfactory father."

"But now will you tell me about yourself, and about—your mother?"

THERE'S very little to tell about her, except that she was a heroine. My father never got over the shock of losing his money. It broke him. He was a good many years older than Mother, you know, almost old enough to be her father. He'd weathered a great many financial storms in his career; but this last one was too much for him. His head went wrong. For years he was paralyzed. Mother got work teaching in a girls' school, and at night she used to translate documents for a firm in Washington. She supported us all, and made enough to keep us in comfort. But I couldn't stand seeing her work the way she did, and after father's death, when my brother Dick and I were eleven, I went into a store and ran errands, studying as well as I could after hours. Dick was different. He was all brains, and saw it would pay him better to stick to his education. He was right too. And it was what mother wanted. I've always been a rolling stone; but at last I've contrived to gather a good lot of moss, after all, in spite of the proverb. Only, it's too late. I'm rich—too rich; for what I've got is no use to anybody."

"Not to yourself?"

"I don't care a hang for myself. Mother died before my luck came; I could never help her as I dreamed of doing. And now—it isn't money that is needed to build up a shrine for my brother's memory. It's something mighty different—"

"Something you have not got?"

"Something I have got—I hope. We won't speak of that, if you don't mind, Lord Gorme."

"We will speak of nothing you don't wish to speak of. But I rejoice that destiny has brought you to my house. I want you to be happy—very happy—under my roof. We are to be friends, I hope, after this understanding between us, friends in the best meaning of the word. You ought to have been my son."

As he spoke he held out his hand, and Troy was forced to take it, forced to give clasp for clasp. But he felt that he was at heart a traitor. "This makes it harder than ever to go on," he thought; "so hard that it would be impossible if it hadn't got to be done! But it has. There's no way out but the one way."

### CHAPTER XVIII

THE sound that Daura heard seemed to be in the room; yet there were no hiding places, save the locked wardrobe, the narrow space behind the heavy window curtains, or the curtains of the great bed. She made a hasty search, and found nothing. After all, she thought, perhaps the noise had come from the corridor. It might be that Janet had dropped something on the stone pavement, covered only with a narrow strip of tartan carpet running down the middle. But, opening the door, there was Janet still on her knees, conscientiously engaged in carrying out her pretended task.

"No one came?" asked Daura.

"Nobody at all, my Lady."

"Surely you heard a noise—like something falling?"

"No, my Lady, I heard nothing."

"Then," said Daura to herself, "I almost believe it must be true that the Black Breton room is haunted." But aloud she said only that there was nothing more to do, and Janet might go.

When Alastair and Vane came back from their golf, rather late for luncheon, Miss Erskine still wore the white rose, pinned to her black knitted golf jacket with the ruby heart pin. Meanwhile Daura had had time to think over the loss of the green leather box, and to determine that, as there was no one whose help she could safely ask, she must herself try to solve the mystery. "I will talk to Vane after luncheon," she boldly resolved. But the thing was easier to decide upon than to do. She could not directly accuse her cousin guest of stealing; yet what could she say that would induce Vane to tell how she got the pin?

AS Annira rose to leave the table, Vane inquired:

"Oh, by the way, Daura, when are you going to give Mr. Troy his first lesson in

dancing the reel and the petronella? There's no time to waste, you know, if he's to do us credit at the ball."

Lord Gorme glanced from one girl to another, and then to Troy, with eyebrows lifted in surprise. "Has Daura offered to teach Mr. Troy to dance?" he inquired, with an air of interest and curiosity that puzzled both his daughters. As a rule he listened to any talk of their arrangements without seeming to hear. Now, as Daura answered, she expected her father to discourage the plan.

"We thought—I believe Vane suggested," she began to explain, stammering a little, "that Mr. Troy ought to be at the ball as well as the games. It's all very amusing to a stranger; and unless you think it wouldn't be best—"

"Not at all," Lord Gorme broke in. "I see no reason why you shouldn't go, Daura, even if Nira doesn't care to. There's no reason either why you should not dance; though I suppose Vane will not. I'm sure your Uncle Edward won't be hurt, in the circumstances, as we have a guest from America, a guest with Scottish blood in his veins, who ought to see something of our customs. There's nothing more characteristic of the island than our games, and the ball is certainly picturesque."

"I shall go to both ball and games," Vane hastened to announce. "Father said I may; though of course I shall only look on, and not dance. Alastair is an angel, and insists on sitting out one or two dances with me, so that I shan't feel too desolate. When do you intend to give your pupil his first lesson, Dancing Mistress? Because, as I put the idea into your head, it's only fair I should have the privilege of being spectator—I don't say critic; for I'm sure there'll be nothing to criticize. You and Mr. Troy will get on splendidly together."

"Thank you," Daura said rather stiffly, angry with herself for blushing. "We haven't decided on the time for the lesson yet."

"If I may be allowed to suggest," remarked Lord Gorme, "I think Mr. Troy ought to have his first lesson without any spectators at all. I know if I were in his place that is what I should prefer."

EVERYONE, with the exception of Troy, who had little knowledge of social conventions in his own country or any other, looked surprised. Alastair flushed with annoyance; the Dean's eyes twinkled, before he could lower them discreetly; Vane's expressionless expression was neatly contrived to irritate Daura; Annira was frankly amazed at her father's interference; while Daura scarcely knew how to analyze her own feelings. She knew only that they were curiously mixed, and uncomfortably intense. Also she was distinctly aware of her own annoyance with Vane Erskine.

Here, before Alastair's eyes,—pale eyes, as even absentminded Lord Gorme must see,—the girl was actually bidden to give a private dancing lesson to a stranger!

"Shall we have the lesson in an hour, Mr. Troy?" she asked.

"I shall be very glad to have it whenever it suits you," he said almost humbly, "since

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